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SARA MEMO
(PRESIDENT'S CLIP
TO GUA M?)
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17 March 1967

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Attacking the Vietnamese Communists'
Southern Organization

I. THE TARGET

1. The Communist insurgency in South Vietnam is basically a triumph of organization. The Communists do not now have any widespread or deep-rooted emotions working for them as they did in Viet Minh days when they were able to capitalize on a pervasive surge of nationalist sentiment and opposition to continued French rule. Nor do the Communists now have any mass base of genuine popular sympathy. (They were able to develop the beginnings of such a base in the earlier years--1954-1963--but in recent years this base has been eroding rather than growing.) What the Communists do have is an efficient, flexible, tightly disciplined and usually locally-rooted organization, carefully built up over a long period of time (in some areas, over more than two decades). It is this organization which holds the insurgency together and keeps it going. Even if all North Vietnamese troops and North Vietnamese logistic support were withdrawn from South Vietnam, the Communists' southern organization (which started the insurgency and through which the insurgency was exclusively waged through 1964) would remain a potentially fatal cancer within the Vietnamese body politic.

2. The Communists' southern organization is knit together and controlled through an elaborate, hierarchical committee structure which runs the People's Revolutionary Party, the name used by the Lao Dong (Vietnamese Communist) Party south of the 17th Parallel. At the apex of the southern pyramid the Communists have an entity known as the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), which is actually the Central Committee of the PRP. Below COSVN, the Communists divide South Vietnam into six regions.

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Each region, in turn, is divided into Communist provinces (whose boundaries are not always the same as those of the GVN's provinces), each province into districts and each district into villages. At every command echelon the Communists direct all of their activities--political, military, subversive and terrorist--through a PRP committee which is subordinate to the PRP committee controlling the echelon above it and which, in turn, directs the PRP committees controlling the various echelons below it. These directing committees vary in size and organizational complexity (depending in part on the command responsibilities of the echelon in question and in part on the degree of Communist control in the area involved). Every committee has a chairman and a panoply of subcommittees. The number and designation of these subcommittees varies from locale to locale, but at every echelon there are always subcommittees for military affairs, Front (i.e., NLF) affairs, and security.* In the upper reaches of the Communist structure, these subcommittees themselves may be large and complex bodies; in the lower reaches (or in areas where Communist control is weak) they may consist of only one person or a very small group.

3. The heart of the Communists' southern organization is their network of provincial and district committees. It is these committees which hold the organization together and maintain the insurgency's essential base at hamlet and village level--the base which exerts control over the rural population and provides the local manpower and resources (e.g., food) without which the insurgency would collapse.

*The chairman of the Military Affairs Subcommittee controls all Communist military activity within his parent committee's area of geographic jurisdiction. (At the village and district level, the Military Affairs Subcommittee chairman is usually the commander of the village VC platoon or district VC company.) Similarly, the chairman of the Front Affairs Subcommittee at each echelon directs all NLF activity within his parent committee's geographic jurisdiction. The Front has an organizational structure which parallels the PRP structure, and is controlled by it at every echelon.

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The success and even the continuation of the Communist insurgency depends directly on the performance, morale and effectiveness of these committee cadre, particularly at district and provincial levels. These committee cadre constitute the target group addressed in this paper.

4. In terms of numbers, the target we are talking about is relatively small. The activities of all the Communists' regional, provincial and district committees throughout South Vietnam are probably directed by something less than 10,000 people. Virtually all of these are ethnic southerners, though most of them were trained in North Vietnam and infiltrated back into the south, usually to their native areas. It is through these southern Party members that the Lao Dong and Hanoi control the southern insurgency. It is these southerners who would remain even if all North Vietnamese troops should leave the country.

5. This target cadre group constitutes the Communists' greatest source of strength, but also their area of greatest vulnerability. Losses among this cadre group--whether by death, capture or, particularly, defection--constitute blows at the vitals of the Communist movement. Thus efficient and effective attacks on this target produce maximum results for GVN and allied effort expended.

II. CURRENT PROGRESS

6. A successful attack on the Communists' southern organization requires (a) precise target intelligence and, (b) effective action based on that intelligence. The intelligence required includes the names and physical descriptions of the regional, provincial and district PRP committee members, the aliases or disguises they employ, where they live, where they work, their movement patterns, their backgrounds (e.g., schools, professions, interests, associates, friends, etc.), the names, descriptions and locations of their families and relatives, and the channels of access through which these target personalities can be reached. The object of all action taken against such target personalities is to detach them from the Viet Cong organization by

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inducing and accomplishing their voluntary defection (the optimum method), by capture or--if neither defection nor capture is possible--by physical elimination.

7. During the past year, a variety of collection programs including Provincial Interrogation Centers, GVN Police Special Branch activity, GVN Central Intelligence Organization activity and, particularly, Census Grievance programs operated in conjunction with Revolutionary Development cadre activity have made impressive progress in obtaining intelligence on the individuals who comprise the Viet Cong's district, provincial and regional leadership. Progress in this field is not uniform throughout the country; but in many local areas, notable achievements have been recorded in obtaining intelligence on Viet Cong leaders operating in that area--i.e., the Viet Cong opposite numbers of GVN provincial and district officials. The achievements are real, though they are hard to quantify on a national scale with any meaningful precision, partly because much of the intelligence gleaned remains at province and district levels (where, at least potentially, it does the most good) and is not reported in detail to Saigon, let alone Washington.

8. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] are endeavoring to develop penetrations of the Viet Cong organization at district, provincial and regional level, penetrations which will not only serve to provide new intelligence and authenticate intelligence received from other sources, but will also provide mechanisms through which defection operations can be mounted. A number of such penetration operations have already been initiated. Efforts are constantly underway to improve them by continued review and assessment of each case and cross-checking of its production with information or intelligence obtained from other sources. On the books, there are 107 going cases and approximately 250 developmental cases which are currently being vetted. This figure is constantly changing, but provides the base from which new penetrations develop.

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9. The GVN has made considerably more progress in collecting intelligence on the Viet Cong provincial and district organizational structure than in taking effective action against identified members of that structure. General pressure has been exerted on that structure by improved police operations, by the US Marine Corps' "County Fairs" in I Corps, and by integrated police-military-intelligence operations such as Operation FAIRFAX in the Saigon area. In terms of pinpoint operations, against precise VC organizational targets, the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs) have proven themselves an increasingly effective instrument. These units, generally not more than eight to ten men (all intensively trained) both can and do operate in Viet Cong territory. Utilizing intelligence collected by other sources such as the Census Grievance Program and intelligence collected by their own efforts, PRU teams are extensively used in operations designed to capture or, when capture is impossible, ambush Viet Cong cadre.

III. MAJOR OBSTACLES

10. At the present time, there are three major classes of obstacles which hamper our attack on the Communists' southern organization. First, although there has been a significant increase in relevant intelligence information, much of this information is imperfectly exploited, analyzed, and collated. While American intelligence organizations are generally well-coordinated, considerable work remains to be done in improving the cooperation among the various Vietnamese military police and civilian entities with intelligence collection functions and in making a total intelligence product available to Vietnamese action agencies. These problems are more serious in some areas than others and are generally more pronounced at district rather than province level, but they do significantly hinder present action against the Viet Cong target.

11. Secondly, Viet Cong security practices present a formidable obstacle to our efforts to reach key figures in the Viet Cong organization. The Communists are past masters in the art of clandestine operations, including the use of aliases, clandestine

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meetings, frequent movement, and the whole professional paraphernalia of covert activity. The Viet Cong are well aware of the importance of their cadres and the need to protect them against blandishments as well as simple bodily harm. The Viet Cong tend to coddle their important leaders in matters of personal safety and the Communists' inverted pyramid of bodyguards reaches impressive numbers when a provincial or regional officer is being protected.

12. Thirdly, with the exception of some PRU teams, GVN elements lack the ability to reach important members of the Communist organization. The police, as now constituted, are incapable of penetrating VC-held areas. Nor, considering the slow growth of Police Field Forces, is it likely they will have such a capability on the national scale in the near future. Similarly, efforts to recast elements of the Regional Forces and Popular Forces into a national constabulary are beset by a variety of obvious difficulties. Military sweeps do provide a shield for the National Police who, when armed with well-drawn black lists provided by a variety of intelligence sources, can screen the population in swept areas and do some separating of the sheep from the goats. The level of VC cadre apprehended in this manner, however, is rarely much above that of hamlet or village committee. Provincial and district Communist leadership is generally far too well protected to be surprised by the ponderous movements of a conventional military sweep.

13. Police action, expanded Chieu Hoi programs, and even some military sweeps can make inroads into the Viet Cong cadre structure at village level and below at a pace which should accelerate as security grows in the countryside. General government success and military pressure will also contribute to a weakening of Communist cadre morale at this level and make such cadre ever more susceptible to GVN blandishments. The district, provincial and regional Communist leadership, however, will continue to be another matter. These cadre have a higher position to protect and are more steeped in and subject to Party discipline, which can be counted on to keep the majority in place. Furthermore, the higher one goes in the Communist hierarchy the greater will be

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the sense of outlawry, the greater the estrangement from or hostility toward the GVN, and the greater the reluctance to expect conciliatory treatment from the GVN or its agents. In addition, even when cadre at the district or provincial level are disaffected with the Viet Cong movement, they may not know how to disengage or turn themselves over to the government.

IV. RECOMMENDED COURSES OF ACTION

14. A continuation of all the various forms of pressure now being exerted on the Communists plus continued GVN progress in the pacification/Revolutionary Development field and in the creation of national political institutions should increasingly hamper Communist effectiveness, lower Communist morale and improve the general climate for work against the Communists' southern organization at all levels. A wide range of GVN rural actions already in train, particularly if integrated with an expanded Chieu Hoi program, will augment the drain on the lower rungs of the Viet Cong hierarchy. Work against the upper (i.e., COSVN) level hierarchy is a difficult, highly specialized task requiring separate consideration. Our attack on the district, provincial and regional levels of the Communist organization can be considerably enhanced by efficient execution of the actions outlined below.

15. First, we must improve the collation, integration and exploitation of intelligence already in hand or available through already existing collection channels, particularly at the district (sub-sector) level. This is really a more immediately urgent task than that of acquiring new collection sources. One promising innovation in this field is the combined Intelligence Center, jointly manned by Vietnamese and American intelligence officers--both military and civilian--and operating (under Vietnamese command) with increasing effectiveness in the MR IV region in and around Saigon. The combined sub-sector Intelligence Center recently created in Dien Ban district of Quang Nam Province is another model of the sort of step that needs to be taken.

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16. This does not mean that we should try mechanically to establish duplicate centers in every district in South Vietnam. Instead, there should be a province by province analysis of local coordination problems and the means best suited to solve them in that province and its districts. Since the optimum means in each area will be determined by the status of local programs in that area and the calibre of the locally-assigned people operating them, what works best in province X or district A will not necessarily be the best solution for province Y or district B. Nor should we devote the same degree of effort in all provinces. Instead, we should concentrate initially in those areas where the operational climate and assets available (including effective GVN officials) provide the best environment in which to work.

17. Secondly, in view of the need for an effective instrument capable of attacking the Viet Cong organization on a province-by-province basis, it is essential that on urgent effort be made to develop an effective, well-trained constabulary force. This constabulary would combine various elements such as Regional Forces, Popular Forces, Police Field Forces, and the PRUs into a body which could take effective action on intelligence produced by the Police Special Branch, CIO, Census Grievance program and all other collection sources.

18. Basically, operations aimed at individual VC leaders are appropriately the responsibility of the police, or of a provincial constabulary structure such as that sketched above. The PRUs have, in effect, filled a void created by the weakness of the GVN's present provincial police structure. The PRUs can continue to function effectively as a specialized arm of a provincial constabulary but they can never become a satisfactory substitute for it.

19. The primary objective of PRU teams is the capture of selected, identified Communist cadre. Heavy emphasis is placed in PRU training on kidnap techniques and methods of escorting prisoners through hostile territory. This training has produced an expertise which permits PRUs to operate in Viet Cong areas, to ambush when capture is impossible and in

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the process to collect intelligence. This training, however, has produced another critically important capability, namely the ability to provide a means through which a disaffected Viet Cong can be physically contacted and escorted to safety, a means through which he can defect.

20. Defection, not capture, of VC leaders should really be our prime objective. The killing or the arrest of a Communist official can have the effect of a closing of ranks for his comrades; but should he defect he leaves behind ripples of doubt and suspicion among his superiors, his peers and his subordinates.

21. Defection operations at province and district level require the closest kind of supervision, coordination and expert local direction. From the wealth of intelligence data that we have, primarily that from Census Grievance sources, we can discover the location of the wife, mother or father of a VC leader on whom conventional psychological warfare approaches and showers of Chieu Hoi leaflets might be wasted. We know, or can learn, a great deal about him and his background from his neighbors or boyhood friends. At this point we come to grips with the peculiarities of the Vietnamese psyche. The divisiveness, suspicions, and jealousies that complicate our dealings with our Saigon allies, fortunately, are personality characteristics of the enemy as well. The policy of downgrading provincial cadres to district and district level officials to village level cannot help but ruffle feathers among some of those shifted and offers a fulcrum for exploitation. Penetration reporting regularly reveals internal jealousies, antipathies and general backbiting among the Party officials, on personal rather than ideological grounds. Similarly, the intense sense of family identity is a stout bridge to use to dissuade the VC relative to return--particularly when the fight is so evidently not going well. Clergy or friends can be used as go-betweens to either the family or the target himself. In other instances, police or constabulary teams (including PRUs) could handle the communications into safe haven and stand willing to see the defector safely into GVN hands. Protection from VC reprisals on the way out has been a major concern in almost every defection engineered in this fashion.

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22. Within each province, all sources of intelligence should be continually screened and collated to sort out the personality targets of sufficient status and interest to warrant individual attention. Stature alone should not be the sole criterion, some reasonable prospect of access or issue for exploitation must exist: family relationships, hard data on fixed location or on regular routes of movement, intimations of disaffection, internal Party troubles, etc.

23. Once the screening process has identified a valid target, however, the decision must then be made on the optimum instrument for reaching that target and detaching him from the Communist organization. Then, when the decision is made, it must be translated into action. All of this requires the kind of coordinating staff now seldom found at district level, a staff which can be created within the framework of a constabulary structure designed for effective provincial operations with U.S. advice and support.

24. For security's sake, but also to enhance the chances for success, the staff should be kept small, informal and directly responsible to the province chief. Its nature and composition should be tailored to each province's individual needs and assets. Should such staffs be created by a Saigon-imposed national directive, their establishment might well result in a pro forma bureaucratic exercise. They should be created on a province-by-province basis without initial reference to a national program. As the executive agent for civil and military matters for his province, the province chief's total support is mandatory; if it is not forthcoming, the staff will not function. We are certain that General Thang, the Minister of Revolutionary Development, would give his blessing and support to such activity, however, knowing it to be generated province by province in much the same way that the Census Grievance program was built.

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